C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OUAGADOUGOU 000504

SIPDIS

FOR AF/W EMILY PLUMB

E.O. 12958: 06/11/2023
TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM SOCI UV
SUBJECT: Burkina Faso: Special Municipal Elections in Four Rural
Communes: Run Smoothly on the Surface, But Ruling Party Does Not Play
Fair Underneath

Classified by Amb. JJackson, reasons 1.5 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: While Embassy observers witnessed the
smooth operations of special elections held June 1 for municipal
councils in four rural communes, the real story behind the elections
was disappointing. In each commune, faithful from the ruling
Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) Party -- possibly with the
Party's backing at the national level -- had disrupted the operations
of councils whose mayors were from opposition parties, thereby
leading to their forced dissolution.

¶2. (SBU) Embassy believes that the circumstances surrounding theseelections only underline the continued need for ES funding to aid
weak opposition parties to better compete in Burkina Faso's 2010,
2011, and 2012 presidential, legislative, and municipal elections.
End Summary and Comment.

Four Embassy Teams Observe Special By-Elections
--- --
¶3. (U) Consistent with its top Mission Strategic Plan goal of
promoting democratic development and human rights, AmEmbassy
Ouagadougou teams observed special elections in four rural communes
on June 1 -- the only international observers to do so. Each of our
teams visited about 8-10 polling stations, all at least two hours
from Ouagadougou and usually several minutes from each other.   Paved
road became graded gravel, then ungraded gravel, and finally what in
many cases were only donkey trails leading to remote villages.

¶4. (U) Despite their remoteness, the elections at each polling
station were carried out normally, with the polls opening on time,
adequate election materials and voting booths present, four electoral
officials at each polling place (typically teachers from other rural
villages), two security officials (a mix of national police and
gendarmerie), and observers from competing parties present at every
polling station except two, where only the ruling party had
observers. Our teams ran into or heard of visits from other
observers from the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI),
the State Council, and the Constitutional Council. News reports
indicate that representatives of the human rights NGO "Mouvement
Burkinabe des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples" also visited polling
stations in the rural commune of Nassere (Bam Province).

Rural Municipal Councils:
Blocked by Ruling Party Faithful

¶5. (U) On the surface, everything was fine on voting day, but in fact
all was not well. These elections were being reheld because the
Councils in these four rural communes, set up for the first time
after the last municipal elections in April 2006, had been racked
with dissension. (Note: Prior to the 2006 elections, only urban
communes had municipal councils. End note.) According to Burkina
Faso's electoral law, the central government's Council of Ministers
can dissolve municipal councils by decree -- as it did for these four
communes in February 2008 -- if the Ministry of Territorial
Administration and Decentralization determines that the Councils have
become deadlocked or dysfunctional.

¶6. (SBU) Not by coincidence, in all four of the communes, non-CDP
mayors had been elected by their fellow Municipal Council members.
(The electorate chooses municipal councilors, who in turn, elect the
mayor.)   In each of the four communes, observers told us, the CDP
had actually won the majority of seats of the municipal councils, but
after the elections, there had been defections by CDP councilors who
chose non-CDP colleagues to be mayor.

¶7. (C) In the Commune of Yonde (Koulpelogo Province), for example,
the mayor chosen after the 2006 elections was from the CDP, but after
he died, a councilor from the Party for Democracy and Socialism (PDS)
was chosen by the majority CDP council to be the next mayor.
According to PDS party representatives interviewed by DCM, many CDP
councilors had defected to the PDS mayoral candidate because that
individual was the best qualified. Since taking office, the mayor
had done a fine job of bringing money to the commune, they claimed.

¶8. (C) CDP election observers, by contrast, told us that the PDS
mayor had bribed certain CDP councilors to win their support, and was
failing to carry out his basic responsibilities. It became apparent
after visiting several polling stations that the CDP observers had
met in advance of election day and been coached. When DCM pressed
them for why the by-election was being held, every single observer
recounted the same, narrow story: "because the mayor refused to issue
birth certificates to CDP supporters."   (According to preliminary
results announced June 4 by CENI, the division of seats between the
CDP (26) and PDS (18) was unchanged by the election.)

¶9. (SBU) A similar situation had also developed in the rural commune
of Gounghin (Kourittenga Province), where 45 CDP councilors had been
elected in 2006, versus 39 from the Party for Democracy and
Progress/Socialist Party (PDP/PS) and three for the Union for the

Republic (UPR), according to the June 3 edition of the private daily
"Le Pays." When the councilors (including at least three CDP
defectors) subsequently voted in a PDP/PS mayor by a margin of 45 to

42, disgruntled CDP loyalist councilors worked to block its functioning. The PDP/PS mayor, Kayaba Sandwidi - interviewed by "Le Pays" - explained that CDP militants would disrupt meetings each time he attempted to organize a session of the municipal council. Eventually, Sandwidi had to throw in the towel and report to MTAD that his Council was not working -- which led the Council of Ministers to vote its dissolution in February. (CENI's preliminary results on June 4 gave the CDP 46 seats, versus 41 for the PDP/PS, i.e. a net gain of one seat for the CDP.)

¶10. (U) An extreme case of a majority CDP municipal council occurred in Nassere, where an ADF/RDA mayor had been elected by 28 CDP councilors and four from the Alliance for Democracy/Rally for Democratic Africa Party (ADF/RDA). (After the June 1 by-election, the CDP picked up two seats for a total of 30, while the ADF/RDA fell to two).

By-elections Symptomatic of Burkina's Weak Democracy
--- -------
¶11. (C) Comment: The results of these by-elections in four rural communes may not seem of great significance in and of themselves, but they are symptomatic of weaknesses in Burkina Faso's democracy. As described in our annual human rights report, observers considered the 2005 Presidential elections "to be generally free ... but not entirely fair due to the ruling party's control of official resources."   In the case of these four communes, it appears that CPD faithful disrupted the normal operations of the municipal councils led by legally elected non-CDP mayors, and did so until the CDP-controlled government at the national level was able to invoke the electoral law to assure their dissolution.

¶12. (C) Whether the CDP acquiesced, in or even orchestrated, this interference by party faithful is subject to debate. It is clear, however, that neither the Government of Burkina Faso nor the CDP at the national level made any substantive effort to intervene at the local level during the almost two-year 2006-2008 period to mediate disputes at these councils and ensure that the public, i.e. CDP faithful, did not disrupt public meetings of elected bodies. End Comment.

Jackson